

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Labor — A Divine Blessing

Leisure and labor are meant to be blessings. There is no opposition between them. Their personal value is determined by the measure of personal acceptance. Time freed up from work can be sheer boredom, just as work can become a daily monotonous grind.

On the occasion of this Labor Day of 1976, I write this tribute to all who seek to find a sense of vocation in their work and especially to those who are engaged in common and unheralded daily tasks. Europe celebrates Labor Day on May 1 and the Church has made that same day a special universal feast to honor St. Joseph the Worker. Our public recognition of the dignity of labor each September is especially addressed to the non-skilled and semiskilled laborers who constitute a majority in the working force of our world and who do not enjoy the social acceptance and recognition that seem to honor those who have had the educational opportunities to be ranked as skilled laborers.

Following the example of Christ who identified himself with manual labor as the foster son of the humble carpenter of Nazareth, the Church has voiced her concern in countless documents defending the dignity of the common laborer. One of the many unsolved social and economic problems of the world is the sheer boredom and meaninglessness of so many of today's dead-end occupations and the low esteem in which society seems to hold these occupations. During the past few years there has grown an uneasy feeling on the part of the common laborer that he is a forgotten person. What the aggrieved worker has been saying in sorrow and in anger is that while he needs better wages and wants to see a fairer distribution of our national income, he wants even more to find a sense of meaning in the work he is required to do and wants to be recognized by society as a person of dignity and worth. One frustrated worker put it this way: "What all of us are looking for is a calling, not just a job. Most of us, like the assembly line workers, have jobs that are too small for our spirit. Jobs are just not big enough for people." A sociologist offers this analysis: "The essential frustration is the utter stagnancy of the worker's status. Wages may increase but not the op-

portunities for advancement. He feels that society does not value his work."

Making work more human and humane and making it possible for unskilled or semiskilled workers to live not as machines but as men and women of dignity and worth will not be easily accomplished, but it is at the very heart of social justice. It also is at the heart of the Gospel message about the dignity of manual labor. The Christian theology of labor derived from Gospel values starts from the premise that people work — or should work, not merely to earn a living, not merely to develop their own personal growth, nor merely to serve the needs of their fellowmen, but also and more profoundly because by means of their labor they become partners in the work of bringing God's creation to perfection.

The Fathers of Vatican II voiced such a theology of labor in the document, "The Church in the Modern World."

Human labor comes immediately from the person. In a sense, the person stamps the things of nature with his seal and subdues them to his will. It is ordinarily by his labor that a man supports himself and his family, is joined to his fellowmen and serves them, and is bringing God's creation to perfection. Indeed, we hold that by offering his labor to God a man becomes associated with the redemption work itself of Jesus Christ, who conferred an eminent dignity on labor when at Nazareth he worked with His own hands.

Believe me, I am not suggesting, nor were the Council Fathers naive enough to suppose, that the average person normally has such a vision of his daily labor. But I believe it is safe to say that such a theology offers to people of faith the one satisfying answer to why they should work at all.

But for workers who feel hopelessly trapped in occupations which seem meaningless and make automatons of them, the preaching of a Christian theology of work is doomed to become an exercise in futility. Effective preaching of Gospel values happens only when a climate of acceptance has been provided. Our Missionaries have always sought to fill empty stomachs before attempting to fill empty hearts with spiritual nourishment. It makes the same good sense, then, to say that the liberation of

the worker from his condition of servitude which erodes his spirit and his feeling of personal worth must precede any preaching about the dignity of his labor.

We are all called upon to work for a change in a system which has entrapped the common laborer. This apostolate of social justice is our common vocation. Each of us can be at least a small voice in a chorus of protest against injustices. Some have the talents and opportunities to organize and lead the protest; but changes are effected only through united action and the collective force of our human witness.

To transform the structures of society which enslave the human spirit, we have to begin with the revolution of our own sensitivity to justice and charity in the neighborhood in which we live. We begin, then, with the change in our own conscience, our mentality and our vision. Every time we renounce our own selfishness, become aware that we are our brother's keeper, show respect and love for the freedom and rights of others, we start a tiny ripple of hope that can have far-reaching effects. The Gospel calls us to action which affects the whole human family. The implication of our inaction also affects the whole human family.

It is with pride that I have called the Church of Rochester in recent years to support the cause of the oppressed laborers in areas which are as removed from us as Texas and California. And what has happened should encourage the power of the small voice and the tiny ripple that has reached distant shores.

I shall be happy only when all of our people have been raised to a level of conscience which reaches out to our brothers and sisters in one family of "Our Father" and to a vision that portrays those who espouse the cause of social justice not as meddlers in other people's business but as our brothers' keepers.

As a young steelworker, recently interviewed in a study of industrial unrest, put it: "Everybody should be thinking about giving people better lives."

I prayed this Labor Day that we all grow in our awareness of our common vocation to promote this better life in which the common laborer can achieve a sense of vocation and personal dignity.

Priests Council Begins New Season's Work

By JOHN DASH

The 1976-77 sessions of the Priests Council opened quietly last week at Becket Hall, seated several new members elected over the summer, chose a president, vice president and treasurer-secretary, and filled committee posts.

Returned to the presidency was Father James Marvin, pastor of St. Ambrose Church. Father Robert Miller, co-pastor of Good Shepherd Church, Henrietta, was elected vice president, and Father R. Richard Brickler, secretary of the diocesan tribunal, was named secretary-treasurer.

The meeting was marked by informational sessions on priests' retirements, an upcoming meeting of clergy and laymen on the national Catholic bicentennial program, "Liberty and Justice for All," a resurfacing of a discussion from last June on organizing joint working committees for the Priests Council, Sisters Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council, and a round robin discussion among the council men — the newly seated expressing their hopes for council action and the elder members offering advice and help on council proceedings.

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan in his address to the group commented

that the "Kingdom grows through the generous giving of our gifts and talents," thanked the assembly for its past help to him and encouraged it to greater activity.

He reviewed a calendar of events for the coming diocesan year and noted that an analysis of the items would reveal to the priests opportunities for personal growth for the growth of parish staffs and for the growth of the parishioner.

He cited especially a new program of priestly spirituality entitled Jesus Caritas. The program was introduced to a number of the diocesan clergy by Bishop Bernard J. Topel of Spokane when he led a session of the annual priests retreat this summer.

Bishop Hogan expressed his pleasure over the number of priests who have enlisted in the continuing education program at St. Joseph's Seminary in Dunwoodie, and encouraged more to explore participation.

He further expressed his pleasure that more than 700 persons had registered for last weekend's parish council congress. "So many that we had to cut off registrations," he noted.

The Bishop spoke also of liturgical renewal in the diocese,

the new offices for Black ministry and Spanish Apostolate and his desire to establish goal setting on the parish level this year.

The Bishop said that this year the diocese is lowering assessments on parishes, returning money to the parishes gained in the recent changeover in group health coverage, and that Holy Sepulchre Cemetery has agreed to make available to parishes \$350,000 on loan at reduced interest rates.

At the June meeting Bishop Hogan has cautioned against "optimism over the surplus" in the diocesan budget, reported to council during its May meeting. The surplus figures, he said, were "very optimistic" and "until it becomes a reality we cannot count on it."

Also at the June meeting, Father Marvin had presented a number of recommendations from the Joint Executive Committee (JEC) which would mean a major cooperative effort on the part of the consultative bodies. At the time of his first presentation, it was expected that considerable debate over the proposals would ensue at last week's meeting.

Initially, the recommendations included:

There should be five standing committees that are supported by representatives from each consultative body.

That one to three representatives from the Priests' and Sisters' Councils be assigned to the five standing committees of the DPC. The one to three are to be appointed on the basis of expertise and interest.

That recommendations of the standing committees will go to all three consultative bodies when requested.

That members from the Priests' and Sisters' Councils are accountable for two-way communications with the respective parent body.

That the agenda of the standing committees will be determined by the DPC Process.

That the present Joint Executive Committee purposes are accepted with the provision that the JEC continue to clarify its communication methods and procedures.

That the JEC would evaluate the results of this joint structuring of committees in one year's time.

In last week's presentation to the

council, Father Marvin outlined the history and origins of the proposals beginning with the history and function of the JEC itself. He said that the JEC decided at its last meeting that it was not a "super-planning group," but simply a communications medium — that it is not a working group.

He said that the JEC had accepted the recommendation to present the joint structuring of committees outlined above, that there were on the JEC "many reservations about the proposals," and that the "JEC is definitely not going to push this down anyone's throat."

Speaking for Father Daniel Torney, Father Ronald Stacy detailed for the council the work of an upcoming conference in Detroit on the national Catholic bicentennial theme of "Liberty and Justice for All."

In the course of that conference, which Bishop Hogan and eight Rochester delegates will attend, participants will assess data gathered at the local level and formulate specific five-year plans for the Church in the U.S. in eight areas of social action, under the titles of Nationhood, The Church, Humankind, The Neighborhood, Work, Family, Personhood, and the Church in the United States, A Latin American View.